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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ZA](#)

SUBJECT: BANDA AND MMD WEAKENED, BUT STILL IN CHARGE

REF: A. LUSAKA 1065

[1](#)B. LUSAKA 1060

[1](#)C. LUSAKA 1059

[1](#)D. LUSAKA 1058

[1](#)E. LUSAKA 1057

[1](#)F. LUSAKA 1028 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Donald Booth, reason 1.4, b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Newly elected Zambian President Rupiah Banda won the October 30 presidential by-election by a small margin -- just 35,000 of 1.8 million votes cast, or less than two percent. His vote totals in several provinces showed sharp declines from those received by his ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) predecessor and late President Levy Mwanawasa in 2006. The proportion of support MMD won in 2008 dropped to 39.5 percent from 42.3 percent in 2006. Banda took more than 55 percent of the vote in only four of the nine provinces. Patriotic Front (PF) candidate Michael Sata's support rose from 28.9 percent in 2006 to 37.6 percent in 2008, even increasing his actual vote totals in two provinces despite the low (45 percent) voter turnout. United Party for National Development (UPND) candidate Haikande Hichilema won only 19.4 percent of the votes cast compared to 24.9 percent in 2006, failing once again to expand the party's reach outside of its southern strongholds and throwing his future as party leader into question. Banda's narrow victory -- as well as the likely registration of hundreds of thousands of young, presumably PF-supporting voters in the next three years -- foreshadows challenges for the ruling party in the 2011 presidential and parliamentary elections. Banda's narrow margin of victory also suggests he will be indebted to his backers within the party, raising the specter that he could face threats to his authority and the possibility of not being renominated in 2011, if he decided to try. However, the new President retains several key advantages that make it premature to count either him or his party out in the next election. End summary.

BANDA LIMPS HOME IN FACE OF STRONG SATA CHALLENGE

[1](#)2. (U) Enthusiasm for Rupiah Banda's candidacy was lukewarm among nearly all Zambians, and provincial numbers bear this out clearly. In only four provinces -- Copperbelt, Eastern, Lusaka, and Southern -- did Banda receive more than half the votes that Mwanawasa received in 2006. Furthermore, Banda lost three of these provinces -- carrying just his home province of Eastern, the only province where he received almost the same amount of votes Mwanawasa received. While Banda also won Central, North-Western, and Western provinces, his margins of victory were markedly lower than those of his MMD predecessor Mwanawasa and are attributable to the near absence of support for Sata in these areas. Overall support for MMD fell from 42.3 percent in 2006 to 39.5 percent in [1](#)2008. Banda won just 61 percent of the number of votes that late President Mwanawasa received in 2006, although some of the decrease is accounted for in low voter turnout of just 45 percent compared to 71 percent in 2006.

[1](#)3. (U) On the other hand, PF candidate Michael Sata retained a significant amount of his support from 2006, an impressive feat considering that Zambia's 45 percent voter turnout constituted just 63 percent of the actual votes cast in 2006.

In only Luapula and Lusaka provinces, both of which PF won by significant margins, did Sata garner less than 80 percent of the votes he received in 2006. Sata also won Northern (the only province to flip from the MMD to the PF camp from 2006) and Copperbelt provinces, and he actually increased his vote tallies in Eastern and North-Western provinces, albeit from relatively low bases. His overall support increased impressively from 28.9 percent in 2006 to 37.6 percent in 2008, at the expense of Banda but even more so from the Hichilema camp, whose support fell from 24.9 percent to 19.4 percent in the last two years.

BANDA AND THE INCUMBENT'S ADVANTAGE

¶4. (SBU) Although the trends were clearly moving against him, Banda's ability to leverage the MMD's organizational and resource strengths trumped PF, which was unable to turn its strong showing at pre-election rallies into votes at the ballot box. Embassy observers found MMD provincial operations to be relatively well-resourced and well-organized. They were particularly effective in deploying party agents to polling stations, something with which PF and UPND struggled in many rural areas. Bias by the state-supported media and Banda's willingness to use government resources and personnel for his campaign further helped seal the deal. According to opposition party representatives, the ruling party also engaged in at least some incidences of gift-giving up to and during election day, distributing Kw5,000 notes (approximately \$1.50), sugar, and cooking oil, although we have no independent corroboration of this and no doubt that PF engaged in the same sorts of activities at some level.

¶5. (SBU) Most importantly, however, it was events leading up to October 30, not election day itself, that conspired against Sata. The disenfranchisement of up to 600,000 young voters before the election caused by the ECZ failure to register new voters on a continuing basis following the 2006 election (reftel F), appears to have been the decisive factor in the MMD's victory, as it is highly likely this group would have voted in large numbers for Sata. While unable to vote, youths flocked to Sata's rallies in the days and weeks prior to the election, giving his candidacy the appearance of tremendous strength. They were not allowed, however, to turn this support into votes on election day itself.

HICHILEMA COLLAPSE RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS FUTURE

¶6. (SBU) UPND candidate Haikande Hichilema was hoping to capitalize on his unexpectedly strong showing in 2006, but his campaign never got off the ground or expanded upon UPND's traditional southern base. Hichilema won just 51 percent of the vote that he took in 2006, with his overall support dropping more than five percent, and took only his traditional Southern Province base. In Eastern Province, Hichilema took just a dismal nine percent of what he polled in 2006 -- in large part because his electoral ally two years ago, former President Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party, abandoned him for the MMD this time around. He also took just 14 percent of his 2006 total in Northern Province, where UPND representatives told Poloffs that they had received almost no resources with which to campaign. In the face of this collapse, Hichilema's future as party leader is unclear. A UPND representative in Northern Province told Poloffs before the poll that Hichilema was considering minimizing his political involvement if he lost in order to refocus on his extensive business holdings, a comment Hichilema had personally made to DCM and Poloff in August.

LOOKING FORWARD: BANDA MUST WALK TIGHTROPE...

¶7. (C) A victory is a victory, but Banda's narrow margin could pose problems for him during the next three years and hinder his renomination chances, should he seek to run in ¶2011. Poloff on November 2 had a chance encounter with Eddie Samakai, the former head of the Zambia State Insurance Company and a self-described MMD fund-raiser -- at least, he said, until the fundraising operation "became compromised" and had to be shut down (NFI). In discussing the election, Samakai, who is planning to run for Parliament in 2011, said the tight poll is going to tie Banda's hands for the next three years, as many people in the party will argue that their campaign assistance put Banda over the top and seek patronage of some sort. There are a lot of people to reward, Samakai noted, and Banda will be beholden to supporting many of his advocates' pet projects. As for 2011, Samakai said "the dogs are already circling" to succeed Banda after his weak showing, making it highly unlikely he will win renomination.

...WHILE SATA BIDES TIME, BUILDS MOMENTUM

¶8. (C) Sata's narrow defeat, however, puts him in the catbird seat for 2011, assuming his health will permit another presidential bid. He will turn 74 years old in 2011. Registration over the next three years will bring hundreds of thousands, and possibly more than one million, additional young voters who will turn 18 before 2011 onto the registers. If PF can retain its strength with this group, the MMD will have a real fight on its hands in the next poll. Should Hichilema or a new UPND leader see the utility of joining forces with Sata (or a new PF leader), the chances of a PF victory would appear even stronger.

COMMENT: MMD DOWN, BUT ADVANTAGES REMAIN

¶9. (C) While it is clear that the MMD has a lot of work to do to shore up support in the next three years, the party retains several key advantages, particularly its access to state resources come election time. No matter who the candidate is in 2011, he or she will enter the race with a leg up. Similarly, the possibility that Banda could assuage his MMD rivals and finagle the 2011 nomination cannot be dismissed. Although we concur with Samakai's assertion that many in the party will need to be rewarded for their support, the President inherits extensive patronage powers and relatively unchecked authority that he most likely will use to his advantage. It is worth remembering that few had high expectations of Mwanawasa's ability to govern or survive politically when he was elected in 2001, yet he was able to win reelection easily in 2006.

BOOTH